

Just Energy: Generating Community Power in Holyoke, MA

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Abstract

This thesis uses the Just Transition framework to analyze Action for a Healthy Holyoke's (AHH!) campaign to close the Mt. Tom Coal Plant in Holyoke, MA. The Just Transition framework states that society can ameliorate its extractive relationship with Earth and redevelop its economy to support this new relationship by transferring decision-making power from corporations to local communities. Drawing on unstructured interviews with key stakeholders from the campaign and archives of relevant documents during and slightly after the campaign (2011-2019), I argue that AHH!'s campaign generally aligned to the Just Transition framework but did not democratize decision-making power. The case study of AHH! suggests that activating a Just Transition framework depends on the leadership of marginalized, local community members who experience the negative outcomes of the extractive relationship with Earth, and that a networked coalitional structure enables activists to respond to the local context and leverage the statewide context to set conditions for activation. The case highlights the importance of increasing community decision-making power and reconceptualizing how community members participate to make decisions to enact a Just Transition vision.

Keywords: Just Transition, democracy, environment, justice, activism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2014, the Mt. Tom Coal Plant in Holyoke, MA, operating since 1960, was shut down by owner GDF-Suez (rebranded as ENGIE in 2015)¹, an international electric utility corporation based in France. What circumstances led to the closing of this coal plant in western Massachusetts? From the surface, most argue that it was a purely economic decision; with the cost of coal increasing, ENGIE decided to stop investing in a dying energy source. Yet, when I looked at the context and the series of events leading up to the coal plant closure, another story arose. The closure of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant came about when a group of activists promoted a better future for their municipality. Their hope motivated them to take a holistic approach to the danger of the coal plant – responding to the community’s environmental and economic concerns. They later employed the term “Just Transition” when they became aware that their vision aligned to theoretical conversations about the Just Transition. This thesis identifies the underlying principles of the Just Transition framework and analyzes the Action of a Healthy Holyoke! Coalition (AHH!) campaign to understand how the Just Transition framework manifested and impacted justice in Holyoke.

Holyoke is a city with a majority-minoritized population –mostly Latinx residents from Puerto Rico. About 60% of housing is renter occupied and the median household income is under \$40K – all indicators of a marginalized population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Community members with these

¹ To maintain consistency, throughout the rest of this thesis, the corporation, GDF-Suez, will be identified as ENGIE. In quotes, GDF-Suez will be replaced by [ENGIE].

identities often felt excluded in Holyoke's decision-making processes (Christensen, 2019b).

AHH! began around 2011 when a couple of Holyoke community organizations, Neighbor to Neighbor and Nuestras Raices, learned about the negative environmental and public health effects of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant from two statewide environmental groups, Sierra Club and Conservation Law Foundation. The Neighbor to Neighbor members wanted to do more than close the plant to benefit the environment. They envisioned a renewable energy future in which the emptied site would revitalize and energize Holyoke, and the coal plant workers were compensated and trained for renewable industry jobs. These community organizations joined forces and formed the AHH! coalition. Its goals were to close the coal plant, install a solar farm, create sustainable jobs for Holyoke residents, and take care of the union workers who depended on the coal industry. AHH! used a multi-pronged approach to close the coal plant, which included a public campaign, a city campaign, a union campaign, and a corporate campaign.

The public campaign sought to raise public awareness about the health and environmental impacts of the coal plant. The coalition door-knocked, visited job centers, held public meetings attended by 50+ community members, and reached out to hundreds of residents and businesses. For the city campaign, AHH! asked the city council to create a Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) seated with residents and city staff appointed by the mayor (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). AHH! hoped that the CAG would signal to ENGIE that the city

envisioned a Holyoke without a coal plant and suggest that ENGIE's failure to align to this future could jeopardize ENGIE's relationship with the city. However, the CAG did not have a direct relationship with ENGIE, the private landowner. Neither the CAG, nor the City of Holyoke, had the authority to tell ENGIE to close the coal plant or determine how exactly to develop the site due to laws around private property and the limits of zoning code. The union campaign stemmed from AHH! members' experiences of losing stable incomes when their employers had laid them off. AHH! members were concerned for the employees in the union whose livelihoods would accompany the plant closure (Letona, 2016). Through communication with a union member, AHH! altered their demands in the corporate campaign while the union separately negotiated with ENGIE about termination benefits. By 2013, AHH! began using the term "Just Transition" to describe their campaign which they argued benefitted the environment while improving Holyoke's economic development and supporting coal plant workers.

AHH! launched a corporate campaign against ENGIE to close the coal plant and push for remediation and revitalization of the site. The campaign strategy included a legal route and a media route to shed negative light on the company. In April 2013, ENGIE delisted the Mt. Tom Coal Plant from the ISO-NE energy list but denied that the coal plant would close imminently and refused to meet with AHH! (Plaisance, 2013b). AHH! continued its campaign until ENGIE agreed to meet. At the meeting, member-leaders shared AHH!'s vision for

a solar farm and for a job transition for workers. ENGIE shared very little at the meeting but in June 2014 ENGIE announced the coal plant closure.

The CAG conducted a reuse study mid-2015. The study findings shared the feasibility of and community support for the solar farm and commercial ventures on the site. The community support enabled ENGIE to receive state solar subsidies to build the solar farm. With the solar farm decision made, AHH! demanded that ENGIE clean up the site to prevent river contamination.

The campaign results were mixed. In 2017, solar farm construction was completed on the site's empty land. The municipal light plant, Holyoke Gas & Electric, began sourcing part of its electricity portfolio from the solar farm. Though many coal plant workers received severance packages and job training, none were rehired to work on the solar farm. Additionally, the city lost significant tax revenue. No other private commercial ventures or community initiatives have been realized on the former coal plant site. A private contractor continues to demolish the coal plant structure to this day (Donahue & Farrell, 2019; Peters, 2019). AHH!'s organizing efforts shifted Holyoke's future; community organizations have begun several Earth-conscious ventures to revitalize Holyoke.

This brief synopsis suggests that AHH!'s campaign can add to scholars' and activists' discussions about enacting the Just Transition in practice. The Just Transition reimagines the power dynamics among humans and between humans and nature. The Just Transition seeks to give people of marginalized identities the power to decide a society's future in order to promote environmental sustainability while creating an economy supportive of the environment,

community members, and workers.² As a result, the Just Transition strives to achieve distributional, procedural, and restorative justice.

This thesis will study how the Just Transition framework manifested in AHH!’s campaign. With the AHH!’s campaign as a case study, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. Who did AHH! conceptualize as “the community” to be mobilized to enact a Just Transition?
2. What specific organizing strategies did AHH! use to bring the different stakeholders to various decision-making tables?
3. How effectively did these strategies challenge business-as-usual processes in corporate and city government decisions – to build space for community decision-making?
4. How did these processes enhance distributional, procedural and restorative justice in Holyoke, MA?
5. In what ways has community power ebbed and flowed during and since the campaign?

Following a literature review, and methodology, I walk through how AHH! informed its strategy with knowledge of local context. Then, I explain how AHH! found the Just Transition framework generative to define the scope of the campaign demands and actualized these demands by harnessing community

² AHH! uses the term, “Just Transition,” starting in 2013 to signal their demands for the coal plant workers and economic development along with the environmental request to close the coal plant. The Just Transition framework I posit additionally includes democratizing power (increasing community’s decision-making power while decreasing corporation’s power) to achieve the campaign’s demands.

power, defined as the capacity to create change through collective action. Finally, I share the resulting impact of AHH!'s work on justice in Holyoke and changes to the decision-making structure within Holyoke's energy sector. My findings suggest:

1. The Just Transition framework is difficult to accomplish in one campaign.
2. Campaigns should be led by marginalized community members. Marginalized community members use the local context of the municipality to envision a future and devise appropriate strategies. Their marginalized experiences inform the collective campaign's vision to ensure that all residents (non-privileged and privileged) benefit from the changes.
3. People are motivated to participate in environmental activism when environmental issues connect to their embodied experience and require support from experts when encountering the technicalities to implement the demands.
4. Coalitions function as meaningful structures to incorporate multiple stakeholders into the campaign. Coalitions aid activists in being responsive to the changing local and statewide context of the campaign.
5. The success of a Just Transition campaign depends on creating community-based decision-making power. Current community engagement structures allow government and private decision-makers

to hear community demands, but do not mandate the implementation of requests. Communities need to innovate and implement a diverse set of decision-making structures to allow residents with different capacities to engage fully.

Literature Review

Introduction

As an exploration of how activists can support transitions to clean energy while promoting socially just societies, this thesis contributes to research on the “Just Transition.” This literature review informs my analysis of how AHH!’s campaign enacted the Just Transition framework by articulating the framework’s set of principles. To begin, I briefly explain frameworks that inform the Just Transition framework. Then, I delineate the vision for justice that makes the Just Transition framework distinctive and delve into specific components of the Just Transition: better relationship with Earth, leadership of laborers to change the economy, and democratizing decision-making. Afterward, I overview examples of democratization in the energy sector. Finally, I identify strategies community organizers can use to implement the Just Transition.

The Just Transition furthers environmental, climate, and energy justice frameworks by not only reimagining the relationships between humans and nature but demanding a change in the power dynamics among humans. Environmental justice arose in response to the disproportionate distribution of environmental hazards that Black, Brown, and low-income communities experienced due to the siting of polluting industries in these communities. Since the 1980s environmental justice activists have reconceptualized environment to include more than conserved land. They define environment as places where people live, work, and play. Climate justice activists apply an environmental justice lens to the climate crisis. They shed light on the inequities frontline communities encounter from

climate impacts and call for decarbonization via mitigation and reduction. Energy justice activists seek to address climate change by making energy safe, affordable and renewable for all people. The focus on energy allows actors to delve into each step of energy's lifecycle (from extraction to waste management) and promote energy-specific solutions (R. Benford, 2005; Jenkins, 2018). The Just Transition draws on insights from all three justices: adhering to the broad understanding of environment while centering frontline communities to ensure that everyone has access to affordable and renewable energy.

Just Transition Framework

The Just Transition differs from other frameworks by moving past “stopping the harm” to “envisioning the future.” Fossil fuel corporations continue to capitalize on the harm to ecosystems and human health. Environmental and climate change activists and policy makers have advocated to transition to renewable energy while maintaining our current economic and political systems. Instead, Just Transition activists envision healthy communities in which community members decide to prioritize human and ecological needs (Goddard & Farrelly, 2018). By prioritizing these needs, they seek to reduce inequities, so all people have an opportunity for a high quality of life. The Just Transition, in the most transformative form, includes a class analysis to understand that capitalism is the root of the problem, and replaces the prevailing capitalist culture with one that champions the environment and society above profits (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Webster, 2016). It opposes traditional climate change solutions, which favor technocratic systems and limit the public's decision-making. Just Transition

activists empower marginalized communities (Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, or working-class whites) to take back decision-making control from corporations (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Webster, 2016). The criteria of the Just Transitions framework for a new future includes redefining humans' relationship with Earth, caring for human labor, and democratizing decision-making to create justice (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

The Just Transition framework promotes distributional, procedural, and restorative justice. Distributional justice looks at who receives the beneficial outcomes of energy production versus who is burdened by the negative impacts (health or environmental) (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; McCauley, Darren et al., 2019). Procedural justice seeks to make sure that communities participate in decision-making processes with the state and industry to fulfill community desires. Restorative justice looks not only at the possibilities for a decarbonized future but also repairs the harms inflicted by current systems. As a result, the punishments of wrong-doers constructively support communities and environments through rehabilitation, new infrastructure, or the creation of jobs (McCauley & Heffron, 2018). To create justice, activists and advocates change how the economy runs by redefining how society uses Earth's resources and values human labor

The Just Transition redefines society's relationship to Earth so that society is less extractive and more regenerative of Earth's resources. An example is transitioning from carbon-intensive materials like coal and natural gas to renewable resources and promoting energy efficiency. With energy efficiency,

humans reduce the amount of energy extracted from the ground. Renewable energy can be used for fuel while emitting fewer greenhouses and pollution. Together, energy efficiency and renewable energy can enable society to have a different relationship with Earth. The community can use local knowledge of environmental resources to avoid ecological destruction and limit inequitable public health risks (Evans & Phelan, 2016; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017).

Redefining our relationship with Earth demands political and cultural change according to Mascarenhas-Swan. Fossil fuel corporations' desire for profit controls society's relationship with Earth, continuously extracting resources without concern for ecological or human welfare (Healy & Barry, 2017). Furthermore, corporations who practice corporate social responsibility still fail to address local residents' environmental and social concerns (Newenham-Kahindi, 2011). According to Just Transition theorists, to redefine a community's relationship to Earth and create distributional justice, communities need to have decision-making authority over energy and economic decisions. Communities can accomplish this by resisting centralized systems dominated by fossil fuels, reclaiming business rules, redistributing profits, and restructuring governance for participatory decision-making (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stephens et al., 2018). In reclaiming business rules and shifting power from corporations to communities, the Just Transition framework highlights the importance of laborers' participation to ensure that their livelihoods are taken care.

The Just Transition challenges the notion that environmentalism and the interests of laborers are opposed (Evans & Phelan, 2016; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). In the United States, laborers often oppose environmental advocates for fear of lost livelihoods and in turn, experience “climate alienation” (Brecher, 2017). The fossil fuel industry has sustained the fear by claiming that environmental regulations drive jobs overseas, distressing American workers. Therefore, instead of working alongside communities and other workers, unions in fossil fuel industries often isolate themselves and support policies in favor of the industry’s interest. Additionally, in the current age, fossil fuel workers see colleagues suddenly let go without a safety net (Evans & Phelan, 2016). The Labor Movement conceived of the Just Transition in response to the environmental justice movement. The Just Transition integrates the interests of laborers and the environment by recognizing that labor supports individuals’ livelihoods and that workers want healthy environments to support their communities (Goddard & Farrelly, 2018; Movement Generation, 2017). Laborers are members of the community at large and often come from marginalized identities like being low-income (Brecher, 2017; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). Since the environment encompasses places where people live, work, and play, activists and laborers, like other community members, want to protect people by supporting social issues like housing, education, and healthcare (Evans & Phelan, 2016).

The Just Transition also demands that workers and unions co-lead with activists. Workers’ leadership is imperative because their labor enables the

economy, both when exploited in the fossil fuel extractive economy or engaged in the regenerative economy (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). With laborer's leadership activists co-create a vision of green jobs and unions to secure "dignified and sustainable livelihoods" (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017, p. 37; Stephens et al., 2018). According to Webster, for a fruitful partnership, laborers must stand in solidarity with activists and organize to challenge the fossil fuel industry. Laborers are a major stakeholder for public authorities so when laborers lobby the state, it can lead to the creation of policies that "maximize benefit and minimize harm" to workers avoiding disproportionate impacts of transitioning from fossil fuels (Webster, 2016). The Just Transition urges activists to do more than support a greening of the capitalist economy. The Just Transition demands an end to the exploitative power dynamics between the ruling class and working class, which has increased the wealth gap overtime. It requires society to prioritize nature's capacity and humans' needs above profits (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stevis & Felli, 2015; Webster, 2016). If successful, community-laborer partnerships strengthen solidarity and overall community economic security and political power (Brecher, 2017; Harding & Simmons, 2018). To create the conditions to change systems, Just Transition activists seek to democratize decision-making power to hold corporations accountable to the injustices that have resulted from the current capitalist economy (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013).

The Just Transition occurs when voiceless people rise against the centralized economic powers. They demand public control to reverse mismanagement of local resources and create social and environmental justice.

They transform the system of dependence on fossil fuels and corporate powers (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stephens et al., 2018; Swyngedouw, 2014).

Democracy, as practiced in the United States, racializes and genders citizenship so that power is unevenly distributed among demographic identities (Paley, 2002).

Decision-making processes favor and empower those of financial means, like the heads of fossil fuel industries, limiting procedural justice (McCauley, Darren et al., 2019; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Routledge et al., 2018). Industry leaders create a narrative that continued fossil fuel use is necessary for the state's economic prosperity. The continued use of fossil fuels limits distributional and restorative justice when certain identities (typically low-income people and people of color) experience the negative health impacts from the fossil fuel lifecycle (Cushing et al., 2015; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). According to several Just Transition theorists, the public must vision, strategize, and actively participate to gain local control of their economy and make economic choices that are responsive to their local ecology to ensure justice (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Evans & Phelan, 2016; Hess, 2019; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stephens et al., 2018). The community's collective imagination is required to redesign extractive practices to responsibly steward the earth while supporting human life (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stephens et al., 2018; Veelen, 2018; Webster, 2016).

Imagination can regenerate local economies connecting local production to local use and revitalizing marginalized communities (Stephens et al., 2018).

Community members increase in leadership and are empowered to take control of

the local economy (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). With this overview of the Just Transition, we examine practices to implement democracy in the energy sector.

Implementing Energy Democracy

Energy democracy seeks to shift energy sources from fossil fuels to renewable resources while challenging the dominant economic and political power relations between corporations and communities. Democratization is a political call to open participation, redistribute resources, and provide reparations within the energy sector. The process of democratization includes decentralizing energy production and distribution, gaining collective ownership of infrastructure, and energy sovereignty to allow for local self-determination (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Porta, 2013; Stephens et al., 2018, 2018; Veelen, 2018). A large challenge is the role of the private sector (both fossil fuel-based and renewable-based) which can lobby for policies that entrench private control of energy systems (Stephens et al., 2018). Stephens et al suggest that activists must oppose investor-owned utilities which local communities have no control over and support municipally owned utilities (Stephens et al., 2018).

Critical processes to democratic energy governance include direct decision-making, government accountability, and open discussion to resolve internal disputes to redefine the role of the government (Fung & Wright, 2001; Porta, 2013; Veelen, 2018). Direct decision-making refers to the transfer of authority from representatives to community controlled councils consisting of public members (Fung & Wright, 2001). These councils provide more than an advisory role; they directly make decisions from “conception to execution” (Fung

& Wright, 2001, p. 22). The local councils are linked together through a regional body or government that would provide resources, expertise, and best practice sharing across councils to ensure the quality of direct decision-making in each (Fung & Wright, 2001). The regional body holds local councils accountable to running democratically, inclusive processes and implementing of residents' desires, providing government accountability (Fung & Wright, 2001; Paley, 2004; Veelen, 2018). As activists work toward democratizing decision-making, activists can alter public engagement practices to increase "robust public discussion – sometimes contentiously – in the public sphere" (Dodge, 2015, p. 250). These altered practices seek to redirect state social arrangements so that power belongs to the wider public (procedural justice), as opposed to industry leaders, the wealthy, or technocrats (Paley, 2002). The energy democracy piece of the Just Transition works towards procedural justice so that communities make decisions related to their ecosystem, well-being, and use of Earth's resources (Evans & Phelan, 2016).

In developing power, the community should make several decisions to define boundaries. It is helpful for members to identify who is part of the community. Widely defining the community within the municipality to encourage a diversity of voices in the decision-making process, while centering the experiences of marginalized populations (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Veelen, 2018). Diverse opinions require negotiation and consensus to resolve disputes. By welcoming dissent and differences, public engagement increases and so does trust in the democratic process (Porta, 2013; Veelen, 2018). Increased resident

participation additionally strengthens social networks creating social resiliency in the face of climate change impacts (Evans & Phelan, 2016). Energy democracy also requires addressing the energy system holistically from production to consumption to disposal (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). Each stage of the energy life cycle might not be within local purview, so one community cannot address the entire system. Communities need to know what part of the energy life cycle is within their power to change. Then, the community should find ways to collaborate with other municipalities to change the whole system (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017).

The lived realities of community members make achieving energy democracy difficult. Though organizations may seek to increase direct participation, projects' convoluted details, members' lack of technical knowledge and time, and state-processes' timelines make consistent direct participation onerous (Veelen, 2018). In practice, energy democracy has tended to mix forms of direct democracy with representative democracy. Direct democracy allows members to envision the bigger picture while representative democracy means that trusted community leaders with time may consult with technical experts to decide the technicalities to implement the vision (Graeber, 2012; Veelen, 2018). With strategy and power, communities can reconstruct the economy and its relationship with Earth's natural resources to achieve the Just Transition (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017; Stephens et al., 2018; Veelen, 2018; Webster, 2016).

Organizing Strategies

Just Transition activists can use different organizing frameworks to create community power and address local issues (Cowan, 2006). Some important strategies to consider include framing the message, coalition building, and leveraging government processes.

Creating a message to make the campaign attractive to potential participants in the community is critical. Crafting a new narrative, a “collective action frame” can inspire mobilization for a regenerative, fossil fuel-free culture (R. D. Benford & Snow, 2000; Evans & Phelan, 2016; Hess, 2019, p. 39). The frame creates a collective identity and vision to move towards the Just Transition, defines the activists’ relation to other actors in the campaign’s context, and demonstrates how activists view society’s fossil fuel culture (van Doorn et al., 2013). When the frame culturally resonates with the broader community to garner support and specifically resonate with key target communities that the campaign seeks to recruit and develop as leaders (Hess, 2019). With strategic framing, people external to the coalition can be convinced to act in solidarity with the campaign (van Doorn et al., 2013). Intentional framing supports coalition building.

We are in a “period of structural decline of the global coal markets” and raised global consciousness of climate change (Evans & Phelan, 2016, p. 333). Anti-fossil fuel activists lean on this global consciousness to create coalitions, thereby increasing membership and leveraging relationships and resources throughout the course of the campaign (Diani, 2013). Activists can use multiple,

frequent communications to connect networks of stakeholders (Stephens et al., 2018). Scholars suggest that coalition leaders strategize on how to present their message and membership to respond to stakeholders and decision-makers in the campaign's context (Hess, 2019; van Doorn et al., 2013). Moreover, cross-sectoral coalitions create opportunities for innovation (Stephens et al., 2018). Multi-sector union participation enables the coalition to learn about laborers' concerns and organize strategically to increase the likelihood of earning support from unions within the fossil fuel industry (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). The diversity and strong management of a coalition improves the success of direct actions against fossil fuel infrastructure and activists' influence in government (Stephens et al., 2018).

Activists can employ state energy goals to create local standards for renewable energy in support of the Just Transition (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Hess, 2019; Stephens et al., 2018; Veelen, 2018). With local standards in place, activists can demand public seats in local energy planning committees and advocate for more ambitious renewable energy policies and funding (Stephens et al., 2018; Veelen, 2018). Additionally, through these committees activists can pressure the government to increase community decision-making in the energy sector (Healy & Barry, 2017; Porta, 2013).

Some organizers may choose to work outside of state institutions because they have lost faith in the state's processes. They doubt the state's power to intervene in the increasingly privatized energy sector (Healy & Barry, 2017; Porta, 2013). Further, they find the "well-ordered" channels for community

engagement that are provided by the government insufficient to obtain the authority necessary to transform the energy sector (Chatterjee, 2001). In order for local municipalities to gain direct control over energy distribution, activists may work to decentralize energy management systems and remove power from investor-owned utilities. Municipal control would allow the public more opportunity to hold energy production and distribution decisions accountable to residents' interests instead of shareholder profits (Appadurai, 2002; Evans & Phelan, 2016; Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project, 2013; Stephens et al., 2018). By altering procedural justice in energy-related decisions and land use policies, activists can create distributional justice by reducing negative environmental impacts experienced by marginalized communities (Cushing et al., 2015).

Conclusion

According to Mascarenhas-Swan and other Just Transition theorist, achieving a Just Transition for the energy sector requires that activists seek to redefine society's relationship with nature, collaborate with labor, and democratize energy governance. These components enable distributional, procedural, and restorative justice in the transformed society. However, the Just Transition is far from easy to achieve. Activists must pay attention to the political, cultural, economic, and environmental context to develop strategies to further the Just Transition. Though the literature posits theories and strategies, the literature could be enriched by more in situ examples of the Just Transition, highlighting the successes and challenges in trying to achieve it.

AHH!’s campaign will show how the Just Transition functions at multiple levels – by working against a global corporation to reduce negative public health impacts, responding to local demands to revitalize the economy, and calling for local decision-making with state support. In analyzing the Mt. Tom Coal Plant case, I underscore how AHH! proactively responded to fossil fuel issues and developed renewable resource solutions by co-creating knowledge and strategy with people of marginalized identities in Holyoke (McCauley & Heffron, 2018). The case of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant will illuminate the process by which organizers tried to engage labor and the state. AHH!’s campaign will show one way in which energy processes can be altered to create procedural and distributional justice. Understanding the Just Transition in practice will be helpful in identifying challenges that organizers faced and sharing critical strategies to create future progress.

Methods

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Who did AHH! conceptualize as “the community” to be mobilized to enact a Just Transition?
2. What specific organizing strategies did AHH! use to bring the different stakeholders to various decision-making tables?
3. How effectively did these strategies challenge business-as-usual processes in corporate and city government decisions – to build space for community decision making?
4. How did these processes enhance distributional, procedural and restorative justice in Holyoke, MA?
5. In what ways has community power ebbed and flowed during and since the campaign?

To answer these questions, I used qualitative research methods – archival analysis and unstructured interviews.

I conducted an archival analysis with ~125 documents ranging from newspaper articles, blogs, internal documents, videos, reports, and the materials related to the reuse study. I collected the documents by using the following search terms on Google: “AHH! Holyoke”, “Mt. Tom Coal Plant Holyoke”, “Neighbor to Neighbor Holyoke”, “Coal to Sol Holyoke” and “[Organizer Names] Holyoke” These search terms often led me to articles or documents within MassLive, Daily Hampshire Gazette, and YouTube. I conducted additional key term (using the same search terms) within these websites search bars to find additional articles. If

when reading articles, other articles were referred to, I clicked on the links to these articles to increase my database. Some links led to dysfunctional webpages, upon which I reached out to the website's owner to obtain documents. These archived materials were created from several perspectives: news journalists, AHH! members and supporters, the reuse study consultants, and government agencies. Some interviewees also emailed documents to be analyzed. I had hoped to access more of the internal meeting notes, but there was technological trouble in locating them.

I also conducted 10 unstructured interviews in English: 8 over the phone or in-person and 2 over email, all of which were recorded. The interviewee types represent different roles in the campaign: AHH! organizational leaders (paid staff members), AHH! members (volunteers – both of whom were white-identifying in the AHH! Latinx-led coalition), political officials and staff (one of which was an assigned member of the Citizen Advisory Group), and a coal plant union member. I reached out to some interviewees through staff connections at Neighbor to Neighbor that I had developed while I was an intern with the organization. These interviewers were able to connect me with others. Other interviewees I cold called or emailed. I attempted to reach out to the communications manager at ENGIE but did not receive a response. Additionally, three of the lead Latinx AHH! members had passed away prior to the beginning of this project and I was unable to connect with the other two as one had moved to Puerto Rico and the other I did not have a way to connect with. Without these conversations, I could not analyze how the primary constituents of AHH! (Latinx, low-income residents of Holyoke)

reflected on the successes and challenges of the campaign or if it created power for people of marginalized identities. The interviewees included:

Type of Interviewee	#
AHH! Organizational Leaders	4
AHH! Members (white)	2
Political Officials & City Staff	3
Coal Plant Worker	1

With each interviewee type, I created a list of topics with relevant questions to ask about. Depending on their initial description of their relationship to the campaign, I asked the most relevant questions I had developed or created new ones. While interviewing, I took notes and afterward filled in missing details by listening to the recording.

The interviews provided me the opportunity to ask interviewees to provide at least a partial rationale for the different campaign decisions and to reflect on the current impacts of the strategies used during the campaign. The archives situated the different events in time and provided additional details to the campaign. Through the archives, I could analyze the framing AHH! used during the campaign. The archival analysis also provided some insight into how participants claimed to feel about the campaign in situ. Further, the AHH! videos allowed me to hear the voices of the member-leaders I was not able to interview.

It is important to recognize the limitations of these data sources because the campaign and activism happened several years ago. The interviewees' imperfect memory means that what they shared could have been inaccurate or colored by current reflection. Furthermore, the number of interviews was limited, so I could not analyze all the multiple perspectives people had about the

campaign. Additionally, I did not interview any AHH! members of marginalized backgrounds – instead I depended on the archives to learn about what ideas they communicated and thought in the moment. These archives were incomplete depictions of members’ thoughts and were mediated by the writers’ intent. Without these interviews, I have less insight into members thoughts on how AHH! changed the marginalized populations perceptions of community power. The archival analysis represents various journalists’ perceptions of AHH!, how AHH! chose to present itself, and the politics of the time. Therefore, I must be careful in analyzing the statements at face value. Additionally, I was unable to access AHH!’s internal documents due to technological difficulties. The internal documents could have provided further information about other strategies AHH! employed in the campaign. Furthermore, though I conducted several searches to find many available documents and media pertaining to AHH!, I may have missed documents that might have provided additional insight. Despite these limitations, from incomplete archives to interviewers using current beliefs and interpretations to recount AHH!’s work, I believe that the data provides a story of how AHH!’s campaign is an example of a Just Transition campaign. It creates a starting point to understand the Just Transition in practice and provides opportunity for additional research to further refine academia’s understanding of the Just Transition.

The archives and interviews were then uploaded in Nvivo 12 for analysis. For audio-based evidence, video transcriptions and interview notes were uploaded. In Nvivo 12, I coded 80 categories that repeated throughout the articles.

After completing the coding, I conducted both a word frequency analysis and cluster analysis to see what words frequently came up within certain codes, and which codes resembled one another by word similarity. This allowed me to understand how different sub-themes related to one another and identify major themes in the research. For example, the evidence demonstrated that AHH! included locals in the coalition's activist community. Additionally, AHH!'s vision included the environment and economic development. AHH! worked to implement this vision through community organizing. Further, the future of Holyoke has shifted to include renewable energy and community input.

This analysis identified the major themes and pertinent evidence that informed the findings summarized in the following chapters. The analysis begins by explaining how AHH! members leveraged their knowledge of the local context and concerns of key stakeholders to inform coalition-building and other strategies. I then speak to the generative power of the Just Transition, how AHH! members' identity motivated them to create a Just Transition campaign, and how they tried to develop community power. Afterwards, I analyze the impacts of the campaign and its failure to help the community attain decision-making power. I conclude with key recommendations and areas for future research.

Chapter 2: The Importance of Context and Awareness of Key Stakeholders

AHH! faced opposition to their campaign because a Just Transition requires a change in how the municipality operates economically and energy-wise. The City of Holyoke, the coal plant workers, and others felt uneasy because the transition would require them to confront the unknown, such as new job opportunities and undetermined economic streams. To make the transition possible, AHH! needed to know the context of the campaign at multiple scales – interpersonal, local, and state. Each context consists of different stakeholders who can usher in or oppose a Just Transition depending on AHH!’s responsiveness to their concerns. When AHH! leveraged the positionalities of these stakeholders, AHH! could set the conditions to implement their Just Transition vision.

Coalition Building

As a coalition, AHH! grew and expanded to include various local stakeholders to shape its influence on key stakeholders like the local government, the coal plant workers, and ENGIE.

AHH! was a community-driven coalition rooted in empowering the voices of marginalized, Holyoke residents – people of low-income and Latinx identities. AHH! formed from other environmental justice organizations (Neighbor to Neighbor and Nuestras Raices) which consisted of a predominantly Latinx membership. Local non-profits have distinct memberships, so when Neighbor to Neighbor, Nuestras Raices, and Sierra Club formed AHH! they increased the number of people who heard about the campaign and could network among

multiple constituencies. Lena Entin, an organizational leader, shared that the organizational leaders worked to “foster leadership [...] [and] lead bilingual meetings” to empower the Latinx membership to engage in decision-making, strategy, and confidence (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). Lena continued saying that during meetings, “members would take sections. Carlos did a section on door-to-door outreach. Carmen would report back on the Citizen Advisory Group. [...] Sometimes Ana Rodriguez or Carlos Rodriguez would facilitate the whole meeting” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). She adds, when it came to decisions, “We [AHH!] took it slowly. There were tensions on [priorities] and strategy decisions. I would have one-on-one conversations as an organizer to build consensus from one meeting to the next” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). AHH! members made decisions through a process of negotiated discussions that respected various people’s ideas. From these discussions, it was clear that, “what members wanted [...] was a positive campaign” to not just shut the coal plant but to also, “care about jobs for community and for the workers at the coal plant” (S. Cleveland, personal communication, January 23, 2020).

AHH! also prepared members to speak publicly. At a press conference to announce Holyoke City Council’s formation of the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG). Virgenmina Perez, a member-leader, opened the event with, “‘Estamos aquí celebrando acerca de la tierra. Y también a la misma vez, compartiendo estrategias y compartiendo, todo juntos, que lo nuevo que vamos a tener para aquí para la ciudad de Holyoke. [We are here celebrating about the Earth. And also, at

the same time, sharing strategy and sharing all together all the new things that will come to Holyoke]” (Oliverio, 2012a). Yolanda Lopez, another AHH! member stated, ““Estoy aquí preocupada por la contaminación que está saliendo de la planta de carbón de Mt Tom. Esto es un problema que esta afectando el asthma y la pulmonía en la ciudad de Holyoke. [I am here worried about the contamination that is coming out of the coal plant Mt. Tom. It is a problem that is affecting asthma, pneumonia in the city of Holyoke.]” (Oliverio, 2012a). Including Spanish-speakers in public meetings reflects AHH!’s prioritization of a politically underrepresented identity. AHH! consistently chose to have its own member-leaders frame the problem and vision, for example, “At the first of a string of public forums, N2N leaders Virgenmina Perez and Carmen Concepcion educated residents on health impacts of the plant, the need to close, and our support for a just transition for plant workers”(Entin, 2014). Another member-leader, Carlos Rodriguez, talked about his participation, “Fueron muchas las reuniones, muchos piquetes, mucha comunicación con lo oficiales de la ciudad, con los dueños de la planta. [There were many meetings, many rallies, a lot of communication with city officials, with the plant’s owners.]” (Climate Summer, 2014). The commitment to have members decide campaign strategies, speak publicly, and participate in meetings with officials underscores AHH!’s commitment to empower the Latinx community members to share their voices. Members’ empowerment motivated others from this community to join the coalition, increasing AHH!’s numbers.

To create a vision for Holyoke, people from each of the seven wards needed to be included - not just the residents of the Latinx community. Jane

Andersen, a white-identifying AHH! member spoke at a meeting to say, “It was really clear to me that a company that far away just has no investment in the local community” (Climate Summer, 2013). Bob Griffin, another white-identifying AHH! member, stated in a press statement, ““I am concerned to hear from the company what the timeline for a cleanup will be and what their vision of the future will be.”” (Action for a Healthy Holyoke, 2014). Jane and Bob’s comments resonate with what became AHH!’s goals of revitalizing Holyoke’s economy and cleanup of the coal plant site. Members from all over Holyoke contributed to AHH! growth. Rick Purcell, a Holyoke resident who ran for city council from Ward 3, recruited members. He advertised, “Please join GRP [Green-Rainbow Party] candidate for Holyoke city council Rick Purcell at the kickoff event Wednesday September 28th @ 6:30 PM at the Holyoke public library to express your support for the Action For A Healthy Holyoke coalition and Rick's campaign!” (Green-Rainbow Party, 2011). AHH!’s support from many Holyoke residents increased city council’s likelihood to support AHH!’s demands. Representative Aaron Vega shared that as a city councilor, he needed to “always hear the situation from all sides, because the issues have multiple sides with different agendas” (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). With a diverse membership base, AHH! presented a united, comprehensive vision to the Holyoke City Council, reducing the number of individual residents’ agendas that city councilors encountered. AHH!’s multiple ward membership made it easier for city councilors from different wards to support the resolution for the CAG, and thus increased AHH!’s influence on city council.

AHH! partnered with Conservation Law Foundation and Toxics Action Center, regional environmental groups with technical expertise, to enact a multi-pronged approach to close the coal plant. Before AHH! was formed, Conservation Law Foundation introduced the coal plant issue to Neighbor to Neighbor while working on a Beyond Coal campaign in Massachusetts. At this initial meeting some Neighbor to Neighbor members learned about the coal plant for the first time. Carlos Rodrigues, a member-leader, shared, “The forty-six years I have lived here, I knew nothing about the plant until then” (Climate Summer, 2014). By informing community members about the coal plant, Conservation Law Foundation planted the seed for environmental work. Using this information, community members formed AHH! to close the coal plant. However, Conservation Law Foundation staff did not take control of AHH!. Instead, they used their expertise to provide data analysis and legal advice to support community members’ leadership of the campaign. According to Shanna Cleveland, an organizational leader, Conservation Law Foundation, “provided the history of Mt. Tom violations in relation to the Clean Air Act and whether the plant was necessary for the markets and energy needs of the area” (S. Cleveland, personal communication, January 23, 2020). The data provided proof to the city council and state agencies about the coal plant’s limited capability to fulfill energy needs, thus framing Mt. Tom’s cost as greater than its benefit. Toxics Action Center provided expertise in developing member leadership to implement escalatory tactics during corporate campaigns. Claire Müller, an organizational leader of Toxics Action Center, provided guidance on tactics AHH! could

replicate and tweak, “so that [Holyoke did] not have to reinvent the wheel” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). For example, the idea to bus to ENGIE’s regional headquarters for a protest came from a campaign Claire supported in Dartmouth, MA (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). Partnership with Conservation Law Foundation and Toxics Action Center provided evidence, strategies, and credibility to AHH!’s claims about public health and energy production.

Networking with other coal plant campaigns improved state-wide advocacy strategies. Claire Müller, an organizational leader, shared, “Toxics Action Center was also working in Somerset and Clean Water Action was working in Salem, so [we] decided to link the local fights together under the ‘Coal Free MA’ campaign for a state push” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). The “Coal Free MA” campaign created a network which allowed AHH! to learn about useful strategies and obstacles to plan for. Additionally, it could sign onto joint requests to the Commonwealth for more resources like a coal plant task force and funding. Shanna Cleveland, a staff member of Conservation Law Foundation, remarked that joining a network instead of being subsumed into a statewide campaign allowed AHH! the, “needed space for their own campaign to fix Holyoke problems” (S. Cleveland, personal communication, January 23, 2020). The networked coalition approach benefited AHH! in its relationship with the state (to be further explored later this chapter).

To understand the local, commercial sector’s desires, AHH! actively recruited local businesses. By the end of the campaign almost 60 business had

joined. At one of the recruitment meetings, previous city councilor, Aaron Vega, stated,

We always want to make sure that we're talking about good jobs [...] we've been trying to implement building a sustainable economy, an economy that focuses on our innovation and technology so creating jobs that are healthy and sustainable with living wages for individuals and families here (Climate Summer, 2013).

When a business decided to join AHH!, the owners and staff could provide feedback on what types of commercial spaces and job opportunities they hoped to see; they contributed to the vision of a revitalized Holyoke. Businesses also helped with recruitment by advertising events to patrons. Furthermore, the addition of businesses improved AHH!'s standing in the city council's eyes, because businesses represent an important community stakeholder. AHH! could leverage this status to increase pressure to close the coal plant and create a Just Transition future.

AHH! wanted to include the coal plant workers in the coalition because AHH! members understood that the coal plant closure would impact these workers significantly. AHH! wanted to make sure to address their concerns. IBEW 455 (representing coal plant union members) did not welcome AHH!'s attempts to support worker transition from the industry because the closure meant loss of a stable livelihood. AHH! needed to gain IBEW 455's trust. Lena Entin, an organizational leader, commented, "Some [local unions ex: United Auto Workers,

SEIU, Jobs with Justice] joined our steering committee and so once we had the backing of labor we asked what the most strategic way would be to reach out to the union workers at the coal plant” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). With the guidance of these unions, AHH! developed messaging and devised next steps to approach IBEW 455.

Lara Shepard-Blue was [an AHH! member and] a union organizer and had a lot of expertise and drove the process by reaching out to the union. So, she set up a meeting with the Union Steward and a couple of N2N members to talk about the goals” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020)

Though IBEW 455 refused to meet, a union member informally communicated, ““What we really want is a bridge to retirement,”” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). Clarence Kaye, an IBEW 455 union member, explained the request. “I was a little too young [for retirement] [...] for guys like me [...] who are so close, you’ll still lose some benefits [thousands of dollars a month] [...] related to pension” without a bridge to retirement negotiation (C. Kaye, personal communication, February 10, 2020). After learning this, AHH! member-leaders announced, “necesitamos que los trabajadores tengan un digno retiro o entrenamiento para [sostener] su familia. [we need the workers to have a dignified retirement or training, to support their families.]” (Climate Summer, 2014). Through strategic outreach, AHH! better understood what the coal plant workers demanded and AHH! revised their demands to include early retirement benefits. However, AHH! never obtained IBEW 455’s endorsement. Nonetheless,

the city council may have looked favorably at addition of other unions to the coalition because it demonstrated some laborers' support for the coal plant closure. This was important because, "The city did not want to be anti-union, so it needed to [maintain a] balance[d]" view of the coal plant closure (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

AHH! recognized that the Mt. Tom Coal Plant closure would impact the whole Pioneer Valley region – including the more affluent, white, conservation-focused residents in the north. Previous City Councilor Vega pointed out, "We also saw a lot of viewpoints from outside Holyoke from the white, upper middle-class communities. Neighbor to Neighbor made sure to take on the leadership and make sure the movement was not co-opted" (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). Lena Entin, an organizational leader, remarked, "We were careful to not let it become a white-dominated space or outside of Holyoke dominated space. [...] There were East Hampton Sierra Club activists who were backing Neighbor to Neighbor leadership and supporting our Latino leadership in the city" (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). To harness the activism of Pioneer Valley residents, Sierra Club, as an AHH! organizational member, organized these residents to advocate for closure of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant. Lena Entin added, "We spread the net really far and wide and activists in East Hampton and North Hampton also got involved [...] [and] came to broader events" (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). By reaching out to municipalities in the region to join public events, AHH! visibly showed ENGIE, through media coverage, how many people wanted the coal plant closed.

By broadening the coalition throughout the campaign, AHH! put forth a unifying force to close the coal plant. The choices AHH! made to increase its membership size showed city officials and ENGIE the sheer number and variety of people who supported the coal plant closure and wanted to revitalize Holyoke. AHH! paid attention to the context of the city, the dynamics between constituencies, and the perceptions of government officials to set the stage for the Just Transition.

Partnering with the City Government

In addition to forming this multi-constituent coalition, AHH! put itself in the positions of city officials who oversaw the current and future direction of the city. Activists' used their contextual knowledge of the city's priorities to construct campaign strategies. By getting out in front of what they framed as an imminent change, in a way that potentially hastened that change, AHH! designed a different future for Holyoke.

AHH! member-leaders knew that the city needed to act before the coal plant closed because the closure would have negative economic ramifications for the city. Virgenmina Perez, an AHH! member-leader, stated that ENGIE "can leave today or tomorrow, because we know they're a private plant and they can close when they want. But that's why we're here. We need to continue fighting for what we need" (Oliverio, 2013). Virgenmina's call to action requested that the city be prepared with demands and ideas for ENGIE, before ENGIE closed the coal plant and left the site barren. A local newspaper wrote, that the city had held, "discussions about the Mount Tom Power Station since October 2011. The City

Council established a citizens advisory group (CAG) and sought help from state agencies and legislators to be ready once the plant closed” (Plaisance, 2015).

Membership to the CAG was appointed by the mayor and sought to include a member from each of Holyoke’s seven wards and relevant city officials (Nochur, 2013). CAG’s preparation enabled the city to pull together the public workshops for the reuse study shortly after the coal plant closed. The quick implementation of the reuse study limited idle time with a brownfield on site and created ideas to support the economy.

Prior to the coal plant closing, the coalition used contextual knowledge to suggest the idea of a solar farm. Through research, AHH! discovered ENGIE’s corporate, renewable energy portfolio. AHH! “named the Mt. Tom Coal Plant the ‘ugly duckling’ to the rest of [ENGIE’s] renewable [energy] properties. The strategy was to transform this ugly duckling” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). Knowing information about the corporate portfolio enabled the members to create a coalition-supported vision that the company could implement. Then, AHH! and the City of Holyoke worked together, as Mayor Morse confirmed, to make a ““solar project [...] a community-agreed-upon value, a goal that everybody could get behind.”” (Peters, 2019). AHH! members contextual knowledge about ENGIE helped AHH! create an implementable vision that the city could initiate.

Due to AHH!’s insistence on early preparation, the coal plant closed earlier than the company suggested and the reuse study included public participation. In 2013, ENGIE submitted a bid to ISO-NE to delist in 2016-2017.

With this bid announcement, AHH! claimed that delisting was sure evidence of the coal plant closing and demanded a public process in the reuse. However, ENGIE maintained that the coal plant could reopen; delisting was not a sign of closure (Plaisance, 2013b). Yet, one year later in 2014, ENGIE decided to close the coal plant. In reflection, several interviewees mentioned that the “coal plant closed sooner than imagined” (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). Kim Finch, an AHH! member, mentioned that ENGIE “always maintained that the only reason they decided to shut the plant down was because it was no longer economically viable. But, I think they knew that public opinion was souring against them and that eventually the legislators would follow suit” (K. Finch, personal communication, February 14, 2020). AHH!’s insistence on preparation meant that the city knew that, “Holyoke might lose [financially] here with the loss of the coal plant, but the city believed that Holyoke would make gains elsewhere” and advocated for state funding to plan tax revenue recuperation (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). Additionally, AHH!’s demand to close the coal plant and support coal plant workers prepared the city to support IBEW 455 by “working with the state for the funding surrounding rapid retraining for jobs” (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). The impact of AHH!’s campaign may have led to the earlier closure of the coal plant, inclusion of public process and a reuse study, and the city’s ability to support the union in accessing termination benefits. AHH!’s ability to navigate the context and leverage the concern of various local stakeholders enabled AHH! to determine the future direction of the city.

Relationship with the State Government

While some people argue that the closure of the coal plant was inevitable given the economic and regulatory context, AHH!'s story of coalition building suggests the critical role activists play in producing these economic contexts (Gross, 2019). AHH!, the city of Holyoke, and other campaigns used the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' policies and advocated for state funding to create a political and economic context to make coal unfavorable.

The pollution regulations and renewable energy standards that the Commonwealth had passed due to previous advocacy made coal uneconomical. A news article quoted plant officials saying, the coal plant "abides by state and federal permit limits and has invested approximately \$71 million in emissions control technology over the past eight years" (DeForge, 2014). Due to pollution regulations and lawsuits, coal plant worker Clarence Kaye remarked, "Coal could not compete anymore, it [was] not viable" (C. Kaye, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Further, Senator Knapik mentioned, "These coal plants are not economically feasible in a state that has committed itself to green energy," (Everett, 2013). It did not make economic sense for ENGIE to continue investing in the coal plant when coal energy did not align to the state's renewable energy targets.

AHH! used these renewable energy standards to demand that renewable energy replace the coal plant. Shanna Cleveland, staff member at the Conservation Law Foundation, "made clear that gas can't replace coal if Massachusetts was going to achieve climate mandates" (S. Cleveland, personal

communication, January 23, 2020). During the time, natural gas was supported by policies as the “greener” option to coal. So, AHH! needed to actively guide the statewide context to advance the community’s vision for a renewable energy source.

With AHH!’s pressure on the city to prepare for the coal plant closure, Holyoke’s mayor advocated for funding from the Commonwealth to support a public process in the reuse study (Plaisance, 2013a). An article stated that, “the city secured \$100,000 in state funding to complete a comprehensive feasibility study of possible reuses” (Lindahl, 2015). With city advocacy, state funding relieved the financial stress on the City of Holyoke to make the reuse study possible. Additionally, the Commonwealth was crucial to incorporating public voice in the reuse study when ENGIE considered building the solar farm. Marcos Marrero, Director of Planning and Economic Development in the City of Holyoke, elaborated that “because the solar field would have been the largest in the state, and the renewable tax credit would have been in that magnitude as well, the state would have wanted to make sure there was local support for the solar idea. Therefore, [ENGIE] needed to get city support as a means to secure state funding” (M. Marrero, personal communication, February 13, 2020). In response, the City of Holyoke asked ENGIE to participate in the reuse study and listen to resident ideas because of AHH!’s role in creating the CAG (talked in detail in chapter 4) and organizing public pressure. Because of the state belief in community approval to approve funding and the city’s acknowledgment of

AHH!'s campaign work, the corporation had to come to the table with the community.

AHH! used knowledge of state-level policies to support the campaign to close the coal plant. Using Massachusetts regulations and standards, AHH! could make the case that continued operation of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant did not make sense, and that a renewable energy source like solar would be more beneficial to the company. Without this policy context, ENGIE would not have felt the economic pressure to close the coal plant. AHH! also asked the Massachusetts legislature to provide resources to Holyoke for a community process in the reuse study. By knowing the state-level context well, AHH! could enact a Just Transition.

Throughout the campaign, AHH! generated contextual knowledge by strategically expanding the coalition, developing a relationship with the city government, and researching state laws to become aware of key stakeholders' concerns at several scales (within a community, the local municipality, and the statewide context). AHH!'s awareness allowed the coalition to respond appropriately and created the conditions to close the coal plant while preparing Holyoke for the Just Transition. The value of contextual knowledge speaks to the importance of locally led campaigns that can respond to and shape the conditions unique to each place. With a customized approach for a locale, community-driven coalitions are better able to help residents create a Just Transition.

Chapter 3: The Generative Power of the Just Transition

Framework

Though AHH! only formally mentioned the Just Transition halfway through the campaign, members were deeply committed to components of the Just Transition. Shanna Cleveland, an organizational leader mentioned that in the beginning when, “I laid out a plan for suing Mt. Tom for air violations [...] residents were more interested in moving their community to a new path” (S. Cleveland, personal communication, January 23, 2020). From the beginning, Holyoke residents wanted to move past “stopping the harm” to envisioning a new future. They developed their own understanding of the Just Transition prior to integrating the phrase “Just Transition” into their framing. Their understanding came from their vision of a future that improved Holyoke’s relationship with Earth, created economic opportunity for the workers and the city, and ensured public input in the coal plant’s redevelopment. Maintaining their understanding of the Just Transition as an ideal had powerful effects on the shape of the campaign and contributed greatly to its success.

Relationship with the Earth

AHH! recognized that Holyoke could use Earth’s resources without being extractive. Local coalition members, “were very clear about not wanting to transition from coal to natural gas” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). They did not want to depend on any type of fossil fuel. AHH! imagined a future for Holyoke that regeneratively used Earth’s resources. One community member suggested, “Green energy that’s truly green (maybe solar farms to tie into

electric switches)” (Consensus Building Institute, 2015). In addition to changing energy sources, AHH! members wanted to repair the harm done to Earth. AHH! member-leaders wrote an editorial fearing an empty brownfield, “If the plant’s owner, [ENGIE], doesn’t completely clean up the site, we will have years of contamination” (Perez et al., 2013). These beliefs motivated AHH! to set up the CAG to re-envision the site. Internal meeting notes state the, “Creation of CAG explicitly says to replace [the coal plant with] any tax revenue and jobs with new sustainable industry” (Kresowik, 2013). AHH! desired that the site be cleaned up and repurposed for sustainable business to support Holyoke’s economy. The members imagined a new Holyoke, one in a better relationship with Earth – non-exploitative but still dependent on Earth’s natural resources.

When the coal plant came down, AHH! also wanted to clean the coal ash deposits onsite because of fears of potential pollution to the surrounding land. Carmen Concepcion, an AHH! member, told a journalist of her concern about, “mercury from the plant could be contaminating the Connecticut River. People do fish in the river and could ingest the mercury” (DeForge, 2012). The people of Holyoke accessed the river for recreation (like swimming and fishing) and did not want to be harmed when using the water. AHH! demanded that ENGIE take responsibility for the coal pollution. Jane Andersen, an AHH! member, shared, “I am very interested in hearing how [ENGIE] plans to deal with the site clean-up and, in particular, the tons of coal ash” (Action for a Healthy Holyoke, 2014). Furthermore, AHH! members imagined creative land use ideas like, “park land, opening up water access on the beautiful Connecticut River right in Holyoke. It

might be a tourist attraction with boats and a lookout tower” to support Holyoke’s economic vitality if the site was cleaned (Perez et al., 2013). AHH! members demonstrated belief in how a responsible, less extractive relationship with Earth could improve Holyoke’s quality of life.

Economic Development & Jobs

AHH! sought to do more than “stop the harm” of the coal plant; members wanted to revitalize the city and create a new socio-ecological relationship. Daniel Perez, an AHH! member, shared,

“We [Holyoke] lost a lot of jobs. A lot of companies went out and they left this city all thrown apart. We need to bring in new jobs, clean new jobs, so that the city can grow again like it used to be.

[...] Because we don’t want [...] for the city to lose the money [coming] in. We need the city to grow and become beautiful again”

(Oliverio, 2012b)

With a new relationship with Earth, AHH! conceptualized different ways to repurpose the coal plant site. During the reuse study, community members came up with various economic ventures such as an organic farm, a green house, and green jobs with a commercial hub set up at the plant (Ninigret Partners LLC, 2015). Through the generative vision of the Just Transition, AHH! could respond to the Holyoke City Council who, “was concerned about the loss in tax revenue, jobs, and the area itself if the plant was to close” (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). AHH! created a narrative that closing the

coal plant would not only improve the environment but also create jobs and revenue to help Holyoke's economy.

In addition to improving the economy, AHH! wanted to ensure that the coal plant workers could transition to the sustainable sector. AHH! members, Carlos Rodriguez and Kim Finch, spoke to AHH!'s commitment,

Carlos: "Necesitamos que los trabajadores tengan un digno retiro o entrenamiento para [sostener] su familia." [We need the workers to have a dignified retirement or training, to support their families.]

Kim: "They will be out of a job come October. The campaign, the whole time, we have been wanting a Just Transition. We don't want to put people out of their jobs and just abandon them"

(Climate Summer, 2014).

AHH! did not forget the workers who depended on the coal plant for their livelihood. However, even in the generative process, AHH! could not provide concrete job offers. The IBEW 455 union members perceived AHH!'s message to be conflicting, "1. Support workers, close the plant and 2. Close the plant, which would end out livelihoods" (C. Kaye, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Yet, AHH! continued to communicate to ENGIE and elected officials to support the workers. At the same time, the union also reached out the city for support. When the coal plant closed, the city supported the union by advocating for state funds for job retraining (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). AHH! members' attention to Holyoke's economy opposes current views of

the innate antagonism between environmentalism and labor – aligning AHH!’s campaign to the Just Transition framework.

Community Power & Democracy

AHH! did not specifically demand democratization of decision-making. Yet, AHH!’s actions sought to implement community power. AHH! first practiced community power within the coalition. Hector Figarella, an organizational leader, expressed, “All the decisions were community led. Members met regularly and made decisions on the time, resources, and effort for the next steps. It was theirs to execute” (H. Figarella, personal communication, February 27, 2020). The typical meeting agenda included, “after catching up with people [...] we would share new information and talked about a potential action. But, we would also be open to doing something totally different. Then the decisions were always made by the community leaders and by consensus” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). During consensus building in meetings, Lena Entin, another organizational leader, mentioned, “We would talk it through and then set another meeting” before making a decision (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). Decisions were made by consensus as opposed to “just by a vote. We asked what the group thought was best to move forward and land in a group way” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). Through internal consensus building, members became comfortable with navigating differences in opinion to further the discussion. Consensus building skills allowed members to agree on decisions, collectively implement actions, and work towards community power.

AHH! continually demanded ENGIE pay heed to community desires. In a meeting with ENGIE, Carlos Rodriguez, AHH! member, said,

“We think you [ENGIE] should be the first company that converted a coal plant into solar energy” Then they [ENGIE representatives] said, “We don’t know about that, we might have to shut it down for a while and figure out what would make the most profit” Carlos said, “You’ve been making us sick for 50 years and all you can think about is making a profit” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020).

ENGIE’s response confirmed to AHH! that the community must pressure decision-makers to enact the community’s vision. With a public pressure campaign, “Carlos and Carmelo [members of AHH!] emphasized the importance of a strong community process.[...]This is our opportunity to ensure that the study leads to a plan for the site that the community supports and is good for the environment” (Entin, 2014). AHH! demanded community voice in the process to create a better relationship with Earth.

As mentioned in chapter 2, different stakeholders were continuously included in AHH!. AHH!’s ability to unite multiple perspectives allowed them to sustain pressure and be creative throughout the campaign. In some AHH! meetings, “Toxics Action Center led us through a group building meeting to grow our membership and a business strategy to get their support” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). The diverse membership allowed AHH! to be emblematic “of citizen involvement. It [AHH!] brings people together that aren’t

normally in the process or in the decision-making process to the table. And it is very important to get those new people and new voices to the table,” shared then city councilor, Aaron Vega (Oliverio, 2012b). In forming the CAG, AHH! asked to create a community member seat from every ward so that the advisory group included regular citizens and technical experts. Therefore, the community members could represent the community’s interests for the coal plant site. Some of the residents’ ideas for the site were, “make it multi-purpose, connect the community to the river, use existing infrastructure” expanding the possibilities of the site while the technical experts ensured that regulations were followed (Consensus Building Institute, 2015). The community members’ brainstorming process expanded the scope of future possibilities.

AHH! channeled the community’s creativity to pressure decision-makers to enact community demands for renewable energy and a revitalized economy. AHH!’s demands of a new relationship with Earth and restructuring of the economy to prioritize laborers and the Holyoke community align with the principles of the Just Transition framework. AHH! believed in the community’s role to achieve these dreams. The generative power of a different and just future enabled the community to think bigger and longer term. It started the Holyoke on a journey to continue to work towards a better relationship with Earth and improve economic conditions.

Chapter 4: Actualizing the Just Transition

AHH! members drew on their experiences to envision a future that improved Holyoke's relationship with Earth and its economy. This vision allowed AHH! to frame its campaign as a Just Transition campaign by 2013 (Oliverio, 2013, p. 13). AHH! translated these ideas into reality with collective action. AHH! mobilized its base to influence public and private entities. AHH!'s collective action provides an example of community power to be improved upon. AHH's vision and mobilization resonates with the consensus of Just Transition framework theorists, who postulate the necessity of local, community power to create a better relationship with Earth and develop an economy supportive of laborers and the environment.

Power of Experiences

The multiple identities (health-compromised, migrant, and low-income) of the AHH! membership created campaign demands aligned to the Just Transition. When Sierra Club and Conservation Law Foundation first introduced the coal plant closure to Neighbor to Neighbor, Sierra Club and Conservation Law Foundation framed it as an environmental issue. Through the creation of the coalition, organizational leaders followed members' lead and valued members' experiences. In valuing members' experiences as frontline communities, campaign goals became multi-faceted, centering on Holyoke's environmental, physical, and economic health. The comprehensive approach strengthened campaign momentum by garnering others' interest.

Disaffected people joined an environmental campaign when the campaign was framed as impacting people's embodied experiences. AHH! members framed the coal plant as a potential cause for the respiratory problems the community experienced, which motivated people to act. Yolanda Lopez, a member-leader, shared,

“Yo mismo estuve en el hospital [por] cuatro días por asma con complicaciones de pulmonía. Tuve oxígeno con medicamentos muy fuertes. Luego de cuatro días, regrese a mi casa y recibí tratamiento. Porque el asma está muy muy preocupando a las personas están en Holyoke [...] porque este muy fuerte de contaminación en la ciudad. Esperamos poder resolver esto porque nuestros hijos tienen asma y pulmonía” [I myself was in the hospital for four days for asthma with complications of pneumonia. I had oxygen with strong medications. After four days I went home, and I had treatment. Because asthma worries lots of people because of the contamination in the city. We hope that we can resolve this because our kids have asthma and pneumonia].

(Oliverio, 2012a)

Other members also joined because of health problems, “Carmen talked about carrying an EpiPen for her granddaughter when her asthma got so bad. Rosa couldn't hold down a job because of her asthma” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). Residents joined the campaign because health

issues had a real impact on their daily lives. “It was personal to them” (H. Figarella, personal communication, February 27, 2020).

Members connected human health to Earth’s health and their enthusiasm for a healthy future generated public pressure to transform the coal plant site. Juan Velez, an AHH! organization leader stated, “si tenemos madre [la tierra] y la madre esta enferma, empezamos asegurarle [if we have our mother [the Earth] and our mother is sick, we need to secure her]” (Oliverio, 2012a). After announcement of the coal plant closure, community members worried about the coal ash deposits polluting the river, harming wildlife and negatively impacting humans who recreationally used the river. The continued public health worries motivated AHH! to push for remediation of the site (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). But, the possible future harm activated fewer people since residents did not currently experience the issue. Once the campaign shifted from actual air pollution to potential water pollution, only the more passionate members participated.

Member’ experiences with less income motivated them to demand a transition plan for Holyoke’s economy and the coal plant workers. Bob Griffin, an AHH! member, stated, “a lot of people [of Holyoke], in my impression, work two jobs are there in the family, three jobs sometimes, [...]to have a living income for the family” (Climate Summer, 2013). Some of these residents participated in AHH! Vilma Vazquez, an AHH! member, shared “how when the Boston Wallet Company shut down and mov[ed] abroad for cheaper labor she spiraled in depression and how job training really mattered” (L. Entin, personal

communication, January 30, 2020). Another member, “Dayna Berrios, an unemployed worker, emphasized the need for state support for job training in the transition from coal: ‘[...] I need training in order to get a good job to support my family!’” (Entin, 2014). The request for job training came directly from AHH! members’ experience of unstable job opportunities negatively affecting their lives. AHH! members also recognized the opportunities for future economic ventures on the closed plant site. José Bou, owner of a now-closed small business that joined AHH!, suggested, “that kind of growth, that kind of job opportunity is what I call the next frontier and I think Holyoke is the next frontier” (Climate Summer, 2013). AHH! members saw the closure of the coal plant as a window of opportunity to support Holyoke economically and create a Just Transition.

In addition to community member’s current experiences, their past experiences also informed AHH!’s demands and strategy. Many AHH! member-leaders were from Puerto Rico and had experienced industries polluting their communities. These experiences strengthened AHH!’s desire to improve Holyoke’s relationship with Earth because these member-leaders wanted to prevent industries’ exploitation of the environment and harm to communities. Carmelo Diaz, an AHH! member, shared, “at home in Puerto Rico a coal plant was padlocked and so every time it rained, he imagined rain going through the chimney and getting into the ground water and polluting farms. He was very firm about taking down the chimney” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). The vivid imagery Carmelo described of continued pollution despite the close of the coal plant motivated AHH! to demand ENGIE take down the

smokestack. Additionally, Virgenmina Perez, another AHH! member-leader, talked about how in her town, Guayanilla, Puerto Rico,

“Ninguno de nosotros, los residentes que estábamos allí, ningunos trabajaban en ese lugar esta planta. Había una contaminación tan grande por lo cual nosotros podíamos ver en las tardes como los cielos se oscurecían y aun estando el sol afuera habían esos ídolos oscuros de tanta contaminación que había luego entonces surgió una noche un escape de cloro donde todos y todos los residentes de Guayanilla llegaron hasta la sala de emergencia del hospital [...] Pero no fue hasta que un líder se levantó y cuando esta civilidad se levantó” [None of us who lived there worked in the plant. It caused such serious pollution that we often couldn’t see in the afternoons. In the afternoons, the sky turned dark and there were dark clouds of pollution. One night, there was an escape of chlorine gas. All the residents of Guayanilla had to be brought to the hospital emergency rooms. [...] But after that the community leaders stood up.] (Oliverio, 2012b)

Virgenmina connected the pollution and lack of local jobs in Guayanilla to Holyoke’s situation with the Mt. Tom Coal Plant. Though Virgenmina’s story elicits sadness and anger, the point of the story was not despair. Rather, she ended the story conveying the importance of fighting back as a community. Virgenmina remembered the power of community to create change, so she recounted the story

to motivate members to change Holyoke's trajectory. Her story underscores that community power is imperative for the Just Transition to occur.

AHH! determined its campaign based on members' experiences as people with poor health outcomes, lower incomes, and histories in industrial areas. These identifiers display that the membership of AHH! resembled "frontline" communities who experience the worst impacts of environmental injustice first (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017). By valuing the experiences of frontline community members, as the Just Transition framework suggests, AHH!'s goals encompassed the whole health of the community: environmentally, physically, and economically. AHH! desired for Holyoke to have a new relationship with Earth that cared for the well-being of the environment, community members, and laborers. Furthermore, members were empowered to employ collective strategies to achieve AHH!'s Just Transition.

Community Power

To create the public pressure necessary to actualize AHH!'s Just Transition demands, AHH! needed to increase the number of people supporting the campaign and prove AHH!'s capability to make change in the city. AHH! used generational power to recruit people. With increased membership, AHH! used electoral power and media to create a line of communication with decision-makers to implement the Just Transition.

The elder population of AHH! advanced the campaign because they could pull on their community ties to recruit and empower others. Reaching out to the Latinx member-leaders proved difficult with three having passed away prior to

the solar array development and one that moved back to Puerto Rico. The difficulty in reaching member-leaders speaks volumes about who led the campaign. The more elderly people (50 years and older) experienced the respiratory impacts, wanted to ensure improved quality of life for future generations, and had time to participate and take on leadership roles. They were the ones who were most motivated to create change in society, but they were also the most subject to disproportionate harms from pollution that shorten life expectancy (Farmer, 2009). Nelson Roman, a younger member, stated, “All older ladies and older Latino men. They said ‘oh, no you have to get involved with this’ [...] then they showed like the asthma rates and all these maps. [...] For me it was very powerful because [...] they led the charge and got us involved” (Holyoke Media, 2018). Lena Entin, an organizational leader, wrote, “Carlos Rodriguez, taught classes in environmental justice at the local high school, engaging 5 students in our [AHH!] campaign” (Entin, 2014). Younger populations within the community were inspired to join AHH! because of the elders’ motivation to learn the data, willingness to share personal stories, and welcoming attitude. It is important to mention that community power dependent on the elderly also has negative consequences. With the passing of elders, the community loses institutional knowledge and relationships that could assist future campaigns, for example Carlos “really had relationships with city officials” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). When speaking to organizational leaders, several iterated that they wished I could speak to some of those who had passed

away to recall specific actions and better understand the impact of the campaign on the community.

During elections people can create the capacity to impact politicians' stance on topics. The only decision-maker for the coal plant site, ENGIE, exclusively communicated with the city. Hector Figarella, an organizational leader, commented, "The most effective strategies were pushing politicians to get ENGIE to the table. It was through this political angle that the community could communicate and get things from ENGIE" (H. Figarella, personal communication, February 27, 2020). AHH! developed relationships with city officials through electoral power. Shanna Cleveland, an organizational leader, stated,

"Neighbor to Neighbor's member-leader model and the political power capability through the [501](c)(4) meant that AHH! knew how to run a political campaign along with the public campaign. The political campaign capacity meant that city officials were more willing to listen" (S. Cleveland, personal communication, January 23, 2020)

As a 501(c)(4), Neighbor to Neighbor could endorse candidates and provide door-knocking support. Candidates desired the endorsement to increase their chances of winning the election. To obtain an endorsement, candidates' values had to align with the organization. Neighbor to Neighbor used the endorsement process to promote AHH! demands. Lena Entin, an organizational leader, commented,

“Elected officials knew we could turn out hundreds of people to vote. [...] They knew we could turn out public members to public forums again and again to show that they really cared about the issue. And leading those panels were Virgenmina Perez and Carmen Concepcion” (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020)

People of color and low-income people from frontline communities are marginalized in the United States due to a history of barriers to participating in elections (from voter suppression to lack of wealth to donate). When politicians knew that AHH! could organize marginalized people and affect candidates’ political career prospects, candidates listened to these communities. The AHH! community demanded the creation of the CAG, and as Marcos Marrero, Director of Holyoke’s Planning and Economic Development Department, stated, “Activists create the field of play and can alter bureaucrat options of what is considered on the field because bureaucrats seek to be responsive to the community” (M. Marrero, personal communication, February 13, 2020). Electoral power made the CAG possible. The resolution created, ““a diverse community advisory group (CAG) to the city to research and develop a plan for the reuse of the Mt. Tom coal plant site”” (Nochur, 2013). AHH!’s electoral power materialized discussion about the coal plant closure in city government with community participation. Kim Finch, an AHH! member, shares, “I’m not sure if that [community input in site reuse] was something that would have been done if there hadn't already been a lot of engagement around the issue” (K. Finch, personal communication,

February 14, 2020). CAG's work created an opportunity for the community to provide feedback about site reuse once the coal plant would close.

AHH! needed to directly communicate to ENGIE, the decision-maker, about their demands in hopes of enacting their vision. Several times throughout the campaign, AHH! reached out to ENGIE to set up a meeting about the coal plant, but ENGIE refused. Meanwhile, AHH! launched a media campaign with coverage of public forums and published editorials (Entin, 2014). Yet, ENGIE refused to respond until AHH! directly mailed a letter threatening protest with media coverage at ENGIE's regional headquarter. Perhaps, ENGIE knew of AHH!'s media coverage and wanted to prevent negative press (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). At the meeting, Carlos Rodriguez, an AHH! member, delineated AHH's Just Transition demands for ENGIE to consider. With an opportunity to communicate with the decision-maker, AHH! could try to execute the vision.

AHH! used community power to voice concerns about how the current economic power, ENGIE, managed the coal plant site. AHH! pushed the City of Holyoke and ENGIE to implement AHH!'s vision for a Just Transition: a coal plant transformed into a solar farm and a revitalized economy. Community power came from increased membership size harnessed through multiple elections and media. However, AHH! did not yet demand community control of the decision-making process.

Challenges to Using Community Power within Governmental Structures

Community power ebbed and flowed throughout the AHH! campaign. AHH! faced several challenges in actualizing their vision. Two main challenges were engaging members during the technical portions of the campaign and creating a participatory government structure with the authority to make decisions about the coal plant site.

As mentioned prior, residents became involved with AHH!'s campaign when they connected their lived experiences to the problem of the coal plant. As the campaign became more technical, people became less involved. Lena Entin, an organizational leader, commented, "I think at the beginning the CAG [community members] was able to stay engaged because it was a broader picture about what is our [CAG's] role and about getting funding for the state. But, then it got really technical and people dropped off" (L. Entin, personal communication, January 30, 2020). In both the hiring and reuse study processes, member-leaders had a hard time understanding the technical pieces and required support from AHH! organizational leaders to keep up. The technicalities did not relate to people's daily experience. The amount of time to comprehend decisions and their implications proved onerous for AHH! members and organizational leaders who did not normally work with consultants or conduct urban planning reuse studies. AHH! organizational leaders would have benefitted from additional support for community members in the CAG to reduce the interpretive labor of understanding the technicalities (Graeber, 2012). However, until the planning department

became involved because of the reuse study, “There was no funding or staff for the CAG” (M. Marrero, personal communication, February 13, 2020). Lack of expertise and support from technical experts limited community members’ participation, thus reducing their agency in decision-making.

Community power institutionalized within government structures created additional barriers to implementing AHH!’s vision. The CAG’s purpose was to “pursu[e] funding for a professional reuse study, engag[e] residents of Holyoke in bi-monthly public hearings on visioning and progress, and explor[e] possibilities and propos[e] sustainable alternatives for the site design” (Nochur, 2013, p. 51).

The city council’s resolution did, “not [create] a clear mandate about the authority of the CAG” (A. Dahlin, personal communication, February 6, 2020). The CAG could advise the city about site reuse but the CAG did not have a direct relationship with ENGIE, so ENGIE was not accountable to the plans the CAG developed. The design of the CAG as an advisory body to the city council and mayor meant that residents did not practice “empowered participatory governance” – or have direct decision-making power (Fung & Wright, 2001). Moreover, the CAG did not have capacity to take on an advocacy role to close the plant. Adrian Dahlin, an appointed city official to CAG, reflected “The CAG had no authority. The only leverage was public pressure. The plant was a large, international company. It could only be swayed by public pressure and CAG did not have the capacity to take the campaign on” (A. Dahlin, personal communication, February 6, 2020). The CAG was an entity separate from AHH!,

an offshoot of the city government, so “to avoid political challenges to [its] work” it could not make the demands to transform the coal plant site (Nochur, 2013, p. 53). Additionally, the city’s advice had no legal bearing on ENGIE’s decision for the site – whether to close the plant or transform it. AHH! needed to continue pressuring ENGIE to close the plant through protest and media campaigns. The usual, “proper” government process enabled community participation through the CAG but failed to provide AHH! with the power necessary to create the change that people demanded.

Chapter 5: Outcomes of the Just Transition Campaign

AHH!'s work resulted in mixed justice outcomes for the community of Holyoke. The results of the campaign prepared Holyoke to work towards a new future. However, the campaign did not create substantial change in energy sector governance. Decision-making power ultimately remained in the corporation's possession. The failure to democratize decision-making power left obstacles for activists' future work towards achieving a Just Transition.

Implications on Justice

The Just Transition framework, as posited by the literature review, affects distributional, procedural, and restorative justice. Overall, AHH!'s campaign had positive impacts on the Holyoke community. Distributional justice increased. Procedural justice improved for the duration of the campaign. But, restorative justice made only moderate gains.

The campaign resulted in positive results with regard to distributional justice. The campaign successfully reduced the particulate matter exiting the coal plant sooner than the city expected. The built solar farm with battery storage made renewable energy more affordable and stabilized prices for Holyoke residents. An article quoted James Lavelle, Holyoke Gas & Electric's (HG&E) manager, "HG&E, and its ratepayers, will receive significant value, as this battery can respond instantaneously to relieve stress on the power grid, and stabilize costs during period of peak demand or volatile pricing," (Smith, 2018). Because of AHH!'s advocacy for a solar farm, HG&E rate payers (owners and residents of Holyoke public, residential, and commercial buildings) acquired access to

affordable and reliable renewable energy. AHH! successfully contributed to altering Holyoke's relationship with the Earth, reducing air pollution and making renewable electricity affordable. Thus, AHH! improved distributional justice.

Procedural justice increased at several specific points in AHH's campaign when public process was incorporated. AHH! advocated for the CAG, which hired a reuse study consultant that could administer a public process.

Furthermore, previous city councilor, Aaron Vega, shared that, "the city council pressured [ENGIE] to come to the table" and participate in the reuse study process due to AHH!'s campaign (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). It is unclear to what extent these meetings impacted ENGIE's final decision, but they allowed AHH! to share community input to ENGIE increasing procedural justice during the reuse study.

Throughout the campaign, AHH! continually called for restorative justice, but the results varied. The coalition demanded benefits for coal plant workers, revitalization of the brownfields, and called for future commercial ventures to benefit the local economy. In AHH!'s meeting with ENGIE, Carlos Rodriguez, a member-leader, said, "What do you care more about profits or people?" (Palpini, 2016). AHH! insisted that ENGIE make right the past harm of the coal plant, instead of focusing on profits. It is unclear to what extent AHH! convinced ENGIE, but ENGIE did not leave the coal plant site idle after closure.

AHH! also hoped to achieve restorative justice for the coal plant workers with benefits and new job opportunities to support their livelihood after the

closure. Clarence Kaye, a coal plant union member, stated the result of IBEW 455's negotiation.

“The union negotiated a lump sum for the weeks of pay so that workers could immediately get unemployment. 7 people received a defined benefit pension plan [...] this enabled those 7 workers to get several thousands of dollars more a month. [...] Job retraining for some members with support from the federal programs” (C. Kaye, personal communication, February 10, 2020)

It is unclear what combination of AHH! pressure, union pressure, and the goodwill of ENGIE affected the results of the final negotiation. Nonetheless, the coal plant workers received some termination assistance, but none were offered jobs.

Further, AHH! wanted ENGIE to clean up the brownfields to restore the land. Claire Müller, an organizational leader, expressed that, “[ENGIE] tried to bully AHH! saying that money spent on the clean-up would make it difficult to put in a solar farm. But, AHH! wanted reparations” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). Despite the insistence, “the bar for clean-up was lowered because the site is not trafficked by much human activity” due to land use limitations of the site (A. Dahlin, personal communication, February 6, 2020). There is no deadline for when site clean-up must be completed.

Moreover, AHH! hoped for the site to revitalize Holyoke. Though, it did make renewable energy affordable, a local newspaper article title explained, “Holyoke solar farm a tax boon for the city, but not as much as the coal plant it

replaced” (Lindahl, 2016). ENGIE did not pay funds to the city outside of the property value of the solar farm. Also, ENGIE has not yet started conversation about commercializing the site to bring additional revenue to the city (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). AHH! constantly urged ENGIE to not just decarbonize the site, but also improve Holyoke’s economy. Despite the demands, restorative justice was only partially achieved.

Overall, AHH! sought to improve distributional, procedural, and restorative justice, but the results were mixed. Though complete justice was not achieved, AHH!’s work shifted Holyoke’s future towards a Just Transition.

Shifting Holyoke’s Course

With the closing of the coal plant and installation of the solar farm, the AHH! coalition disbanded. AHH!’s vision inspired some community members and organizations to continue working on projects that pursue a Just Transition for Holyoke. After the closure of the Mt. Tom Coal Plant, Neighbor to Neighbor, a member of AHH!, joined a statewide coalition called Mass Power Forward. Mass Power Forward activists continue to pressure the Commonwealth to pass legislation in support of renewable energy and equitable investment in environmental justice communities (Theberge et al., 2015). Neighbor to Neighbor also worked with the Columbia Gas Resistance Group coalition in the Pioneer Valley to pressure HG&E to prevent natural gas capacity expansion (AHH! Member, personal communication, February 16, 2020; Christensen, 2019a). Additionally, starting in 2019, Neighbor to Neighbor and Nueva Esperanza, a Latinx-led organization in Holyoke, began collaborating on a climate hub

initiative to create a net-zero building that hosts local green jobs in Holyoke. Furthermore, a previous AHH! member shared, “I would say that creating community power is [Neighbor to Neighbor’s] latest big goal, along with creating better representation in city council” to better represent the minoritized identities within the city (AHH! Member, personal communication, February 16, 2020). Nuestra Raices also continues to work on urban agriculture initiatives and community empowerment (AHH! Member, personal communication, February 16, 2020). At the city level, Holyoke’s Planning Department seeks to complete an energy transition plan to “improve energy efficiency, increase renewable energy sources, and change habits throughout the city” (M. Marrero, personal communication, February 13, 2020). Since AHH!’s campaign, Holyoke organizations continue to strive towards the Just Transition. Yet, the work to advance the Just Transition has faced impediments due to the community’s lack of decision-making power.

Democratization Challenges

Despite AHH!’s effort to create community power, the coalition did not change who made the decisions about Holyoke’s energy. ENGIE retained complete power over deciding the future of the coal plant site. And today, HG&E’s institutional representatives decide Holyoke’s energy portfolio with little community engagement. Community members can share their opinion, but they lack decision-making power to guarantee implementation of their ideas.

The Mt. Tom Coal Plant site was and is still privately controlled. The City of Holyoke did not own the land. Though the reuse study included public process,

ENGIE had complete control of how to redevelop the land. Claire Müller, an organizational leader, stated, “The corporation had the power – to decide if the coal plant would close, what would happen to the workers, what would happen to contamination on the site” (C. Müller, personal communication, February 4, 2020). The CAG included a community process in the reuse study to allow the public to state their opinions and create an opportunity for ENGIE to cooperate with the community. However, the extent to which ENGIE listened to the community process was arbitrary. No laws or regulations mandated ENGIE to enact the community vision after the closure. Clarence Kaye, a coal plant worker and Holyoke resident, commented, “It’s nice to have the community together, but the public doesn’t own the land. There were a lot of grand ideas, but at the end of the day, the company is going to choose what they want to do, because it is their land” (C. Kaye, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Several interviewees reiterated the lack of public control in reflection, which had also come up as a comment during the reuse study.

“Carri Hulet [a reuse study consultant] also responded to the question, ‘Why are we doing this?’ She acknowledged the concern behind the question – this is a private property owned by a private company. [...] She said this process helps to equalize the information so the company, the community, and the city have similar information about what’s possible when it comes time for any private property owner to negotiate with the City” (Ninigret Partners LLC, 2015).

Hulet highlighted that though the community might not have power, sharing ideas could have future potential use. However, since the start of this thesis, “city council and the public had some ideas for commercial ventures, but nothing has happened” (A. Vega, personal communication, February 11, 2020). Since the coal plant site only became a solar field with no other commercial ventures it suggests that the public engagement process in the reuse study was an example of tokenism (Arnstein, 1969). The public process informed residents about the limitations and possibilities of the site but did not create structures or processes to ensure implementation of community designs for economically revitalizing site. AHH! members had envisioned a new Holyoke with green jobs and a thriving economy. The lack of public control of the site diminished the potential to fulfil the community’s ideas.

Participatory democratization of the city’s energy was not a campaign goal. The bulk of the campaign focused on getting ENGIE to act, instead of creating opportunities for public control over the site. The lack of demand for public control minimized momentum in Neighbor to Neighbor’s recent energy campaign. A previous AHH! member felt like, “HG&E, [doesn’t] seem to understand the necessity of Neighbor to Neighbor or community engagement” (AHH! Member, personal communication, February 16, 2020). Despite the community power used to close the plant and complete the reuse study, local organizations still face significant challenges in demanding community engagement within Holyoke’s energy sector.

Analyzing AHH!'s failure to create structures for community decision-making power within the energy sector, suggests that either AHH! did not demand democratization of energy proceedings or required use of other organizing strategies to enable local self-determination of energy decisions. This failure has important implications for future Just Transition campaigns. Activists must imagine their campaigns as one step on the path to increase public decision-making in private-public relationships. Each campaign will need to demand public control of vision and implementation. The campaigns will likely require a creative, multi-pronged strategy to work outside government community engagement procedures to completely actualize the Just Transition.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

AHH!'s campaign provides an example of the Just Transition framework in practice. AHH! sought to improve Holyoke's relationship with Earth by promoting renewable energy and imagining other sustainable commercial ventures on the coal plant site. Members wanted to restructure the economy by making sure that the transition prioritized the coal plant workers' livelihoods and the residents of Holyoke over the profits ENGIE could make. The coalition believed in the power of the community to enact the vision for the coal plant site.

AHH! navigated local concerns and leveraged state government policies to transform the Mt. Tom Coal Plant. Marginalized identities at the forefront of the coalition allowed AHH! to develop community power to enact an environmental and economic vision. The campaign moderately improved distributional, procedural, and restorative justice outcomes in Holyoke. Yet, power remained in the corporation's possession; AHH! ultimately failed to democratize decision-making power. However, AHH!'s work inspired local organizations to continue moving Holyoke towards a Just Transition.

Findings & Recommendations

1. The Just Transition framework suggests a journey.

AHH! sought to revitalize Holyoke's economy when closing the coal plant, but this has yet to occur on the site. The Just Transition framework has motivated Holyoke organizations like Neighbor to Neighbor, Nueva Esperanza, and Nuestras Raices to use community power to create an economy that responsibly uses Earth's resources. Successfully achieving

this goal requires changing society's preference for corporate power and large profit margins at any cost. Activists will face many obstacles, so each project or campaign must lay groundwork to increase community power. The groundwork may include demanding authorities to create meaningful structures to enact community power, not just advisory boards.

2. Make sure marginalized identities within the local community lead the campaign.

By centering low-income, people of color who experienced joblessness and health issues, AHH!'s campaign decided to holistically overhaul the plant. They sought to transform it from a fossil fuel-based, pollutant to a site creating multiple economic streams for Holyoke. Community members knew the local context better than regional or state environmentalists: its strengths, challenges, histories, and potential futures. With an environmental and economic vision, AHH! could respond to politicians' economic development concerns and laborers' livelihood concerns. When frontline communities are the leaders in environmental campaigns, they seek to address the potential negative consequences of transitioning from fossil fuels. They consider a future that betters not just the environment but also people's quality of life garnering more support for the campaign.

3. Relate environmental issues to people's lived experience and then keep them invested through other means.

AHH! members framed the coal plant as an enemy of public health. The health issues AHH! spoke about resonated with community members and attracted them to the campaign vision because they experienced respiratory issues. However, when the campaign shifted to potential future water pollution and technical aspects of the vision, people found it difficult to stay involved. Activists can help members stay engaged by connecting the future to people's current experiences and providing continued opportunities for education and leadership. Additionally, technical experts should use their expertise to inform and empower members so that members can participate.

4. Intentionally create the coalition and support networking amongst similar coalitions.

AHH! developed a multi-faceted vision and creative strategies and portrayed a united front because of its diverse coalition. Managing a coalition required strong consensus building and communication skills to negotiate between the different constituencies. AHH!'s ability to maintain unity convinced city officials of the broad support for the campaign. Thus, city officials were more willing to assist the campaign.

Networking between coalitions allowed AHH! to learn of new strategies, while maintaining its autonomy to better respond to the local context. Networking also allowed the coalitions to jointly advocate for legislation and funding from the Commonwealth. Massachusetts government regulated air pollution from coal plants, funded the reuse

study, and provided solar subsidies to make the solar farm affordable to ENGIE. This case demonstrates that state policies deeply impact the economic rationale behind energy systems. If coalitions want to create favorable conditions for renewable energy, networks of coalitions need to convince state, regional, and country governments of three responsibilities. One responsibility includes regulating fossil fuel infrastructure so that companies must financially invest in equipment to prevent the pollution emitted by fossil fuels, thus making fossil fuel business more expensive. The other responsibilities include subsidizing initial investment in renewable energy infrastructure and financing local municipalities' transition to renewable energy to make renewable energy more affordable.

5. Support community power-building to create new forms of community decision-making power. Technical experts should be held accountable to the community to support community decision-making power.

AHH! used electoral power to obtain elected officials' attention. Neighbor to Neighbor supported the candidacy of candidates that aligned to AHH!'s platform. When candidates won, the coalition continued to pressure the elected officials to follow through. This pressure included hosting events to demonstrate turnout and regularly contacting officials. Legislators need to make electoral work accessible to local organizations, so legal statutes do not hinder local organizing while privileging corporate interests in elections.

AHH! used community power to take down barriers to conversing with ENGIE. AHH! leveraged multiple influential partners like the media and the government. Because of AHH!'s continuous engagement, the city worked to have ENGIE and AHH! in the same room. However, the CAG's facilitation of the reuse study or the residents' participation in the public workshops did not require that ENGIE enact the community's vision. Communities need to demand and create new structures for decision-making power.

While communities enact decision-making power, they will need support. AHH! members learned technical knowledge about the coal plant pollution and organizing strategies from regional environmental organizations. AHH! used this knowledge to make informed campaign decisions by consensus. However, AHH! and community members on the CAG lacked similar technical support during the reuse study, which made it difficult for community members to engage and make decisions. Democracy within the Just Transition means collective construction of the vision and the creation of structures to support informed community-based decision-making. Technical experts should be held accountable to communities to empower residents with the necessary knowledge to make decisions. Consistent direct participation can be difficult for members who do not have the capacity to learn the technicalities. In these situations, technical experts can work with community representatives or be delegated to establish options. Developing the options should go through

an iterative process in which the community representatives ascertain vision and value alignment of the options technical experts created. After a thorough and iterative process of creating options, the community representatives can bring the choices back to the broader community to make the decision by consensus.

Future Research

These thesis findings elicit additional questions about the Just Transition. Interviewing more AHH! members and other organizational leaders can surface lessons about the coalition building process and the development of democracy within AHH!. Contacting additional IBEW 455 members and investigating AHH!'s communications with IBEW 455 could uncover specific challenges in developing the relationship between the coalition and the laborers. By interviewing a representative from ENGIE, a researcher might gain knowledge of successful and failed strategies to increase communications between communities and corporations. Furthermore, conversations with ENGIE might provide some insight into AHH!'s role in the negotiations with the union and site reuse.

This thesis explores only one case of the Just Transition. Further research should analyze subsequent Just Transition campaigns in Holyoke, examine their successes and challenges, and identify how one campaign impacts another. This research would identify what groundwork Holyoke campaigns need to make the next campaign more successful. Additionally, the research could reveal changes in how the Holyoke community understands the Just Transition over time. Aside

from focusing on Holyoke, future research should compare Just Transition campaigns between locations to identify global successes and challenges.

Furthermore, this thesis raises questions about what democracy is. Future research could survey different understandings of democracy, how government institutions create or prohibit opportunity for community power, and how other communities have created community decision-making power. Additionally, it would be interesting to learn how different democratic structures used within organizations shape participants' desires for democratic structures in any level of government.

Final Thoughts

The Just Transition framework has been conceptualized in many forms since its introduction in the 1970s. In a world that favors corporate management of energy, the Just Transition framework asks local communities to undertake decision-making and transform the local economy to improve its relationship with Earth. This thesis analyzed the AHH! campaign as a specific case study to illustrate the Just Transition in practice to inform organizers, funders, and other allies about best practices and challenges. The findings explicate several strategies to implement a Just Transition campaign and highlights the difficulties of achieving democratization of decision-making power. The opportunities for future research explore how the Just Transition agenda can be advanced to improve society's relationship with Earth, invigorate the economy and shift decision-making power from corporations to local communities.

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